

Curriculum for Excellence: Religious and Moral Education
Experiences and Outcomes

Response from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Religious and Moral Education strand of the Curriculum for Excellence, and agrees that *"Religious and moral education is ... an essential part of every child or young person's educational experience."*

We do, however, have serious concerns about many of the proposals in this document, some of which are in direct opposition to the stated intention that *"account must be taken of the school's communities, and the context in which the children and young people live and learn"*. No religion other than Christianity is referred to by name, and the communities and context of many children in Scotland are not acknowledged. Unfortunately this sets the tone for the proposals as a whole.

The proposed curriculum is intended to *"create opportunities for personalisation and choice, depth and reflection"*, and to *"develop empathy, tolerance and respect for others and so learn to value diversity"*. As currently drafted, the reverse appears more likely. Faced with a curriculum that is so determinedly and explicitly Christian, many parents from a minority religion may decide that the most appropriate option is to withdraw their children from the course.

1. The draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes are clearly worded. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>don't know</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The experiences and outcomes are clearly worded, which enables us to say with confidence that **their creation of a Christian norm and a non-Christian "other" is objectionable, and will inevitably alienate non-Christians rather than encouraging dialogue or promoting respect.**

2. The expectations of the draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes at each level are suitably challenging. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>don't know</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

This question presumes that the proposed curriculum is structured and presented in an appropriate way. **We believe it is seriously flawed in what it expects of the child and what it presents to the child, and, however "challenging" it may be, the proposed curriculum is most certainly not "suitable".**

3. Overall, the draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes provide a good basis for planning how children and young people will progress in their learning in Religious and moral education. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree

agree

disagree

strongly disagree

don't know

Language and Frame of Reference

The "**otherness**" of non-Christian religion is asserted in the fundamental structure of the curriculum, which from the outset divides religion into Christianity and "**other**":

- Outcomes for the study of Christianity are discussed using concrete terms such as "*Christians*", "*Christian people*", "*God*", "*Jesus*", "*Bible stories*", and "*Christian communities in my local area*".
- The outcomes for the study of Christianity are expressed as the personal learning objectives of the pupil, in the first person: "*I can explain*", "*I am able to reflect*".
- The context of the proposed curriculum is made concrete by the use of terms such as "*contemporary religious life in Scotland*", "*the development of modern Scotland*", "*Scotland's religious and cultural diversity*", and "*global context*", and yet no religion other than Christianity is mentioned by name.

The following two examples demonstrate the way in which Christian language has been falsely used as if universal.

i) Biographical narrative about Jesus and his personal teachings are fundamental to Christian worship and study, which gives rise to RME 204E "*the lives and teachings of Jesus and key Christian figures*". This area of study has been carried across to other world religions in RME 212Q "*the lives and teachings of key figures from other world religions*". However, while there are Jewish figures whose personal lives have religious import, this is not a typical Jewish emphasis; the history of a people and texts written by or about those people are more important than the individuals themselves, and prophets are not seen as conveying a personal message. Furthermore, "life and teaching" has a Christian nuance that is alien to the Jewish frame of mind. (Content retrieved from an internet search for "life and teaching" relates primarily to Confucius, Buddha, and Jesus.)

ii) The proposed curriculum frames all values in terms of Christianity, failing to recognise that not all religions share the same emphasis. "*Caring, sharing, fairness, equality, and love*" are described as "*Christian values*" (RME 104E) which implies that these values are proprietarily Christian and that other faiths at best merely borrow from Christianity. This is clearly objectionable. Conversely, transposing these values to other faiths (RME 111Q) presupposes that all faiths express their values in the same terms. The choice and emphasis of these terms have a Christian nuance. Judaism would be more likely to highlight kindness, social justice, and personal responsibility as core moral values, and indeed the declaration "*I can show understanding of Christian values ...*" in RME 104E belies the neutrality of RME 111Q.

Sustained use of Christian terminology, reference to the Scottish Christian context, and the immediacy of the first person, all contribute to a Christianity curriculum that appears accessible, relevant, and anchored in the familiar and concrete. The proposed curriculum for non-Christian religions contrasts sharply with this, and is characterised by otherness and abstraction (despite replicated Scottish references). No concrete terms are associated with these, indeed other faiths are described using language derived solely from Christianity.

Good practice is that “The categories of one religion should not be used in any attempt to understand or describe another”.¹

Personalisation of learning

The form of the proposed curriculum, a collection of first-person singular learning outcomes, reflects Scottish classroom practice of encouraging pupils’ metacognition: awareness and acknowledgement of what it is they are learning. This personalisation of learning works for the Christian curriculum. “*I am becoming familiar with some beliefs Christian people have about God and Jesus*” (RME 001A) is quite straightforward. But, since other religions are only “other” in relation to Christianity, the non-Christian parallel “*I am becoming familiar with the beliefs of other world religions*” (RME 004L) only makes sense for Christian children. Even if “*other world religions*” is intended as a placeholder not intended for classroom use, the phrase at best communicates bias (or at least a lack of parity) to the teacher. It reinforces the worldview of the teacher who was heard to tell a P1 class: “just as **we** celebrate Christmas, Hindus celebrate Diwali”. Her implication was not lost on a Jewish five-year-old. But if the phrase is intended as an expression by the children of what they are learning, then it is obviously inappropriate for children whose religion is, for example, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh, since it estranges them from their own heritage and upbringing.

Moreover “*becoming familiar*” is imprecise, and suggests a degree of assimilation and an expectation of attachment. Many families of another faith will reasonably object to their children “*becoming familiar*” with what are to them at least false and at worst heretical beliefs in the same context as they “become familiar” with the truths of mathematics. **It is important, especially for a small child, to maintain a clear distinction between learning about religions other than one’s own and becoming personally engaged with them. We would suggest that “becoming aware of” would be preferable.**

One parent told us:

The question is how teachers ensure that students understand that different religious traditions attach different views to the same text, if teachers do this at all? I've actually found it very difficult to find out just what is being taught and how, as some teachers immediately go on the defensive saying the purpose of the RME classes is not to proselytise but to gain respect for differing traditions, which is not the issue. I've found it difficult to get beyond this wall of defence to raise issues like the above that concern me.

An exclusive curriculum

This, then, is the framework on which it is proposed that the teacher builds his or her own teaching: Christianity is the norm and everything else is alien.

The experiences and outcomes document assumes a façade of inclusiveness, but in fact sends a supremely influential message to the teacher that inclusiveness does not require effort or attention; that simply by *calling* it an inclusive curriculum, inclusiveness is achieved. If this message is embodied in the learning experience, it will force the non-Christian child to perceive his or her own family and community religious life as alien, and this may be profoundly damaging. The learning experiences inherent in this curriculum are, for the Christian child: “I belong here; I feel at home”; for the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh child, “I’m different,” and so risk the conclusion “I don’t belong”.

¹ Anderson, Robert (undated) *Responses to Jesus: the Jewish “no” and the Christian “yes”*, International Council of Christians and Jews, website :<http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=798>

The three experiences and outcomes tables devoted to the study of Christianity serve as a template for the study of world religions in general, and close comparison of "Christian" and "other" outcomes reveals that, with three exceptions (discussed below) they are exactly parallel. With no more than minor changes of syntax, the "other" outcomes can be created mechanically by simply substituting "other world religions" for "Christian".

Given the use of Christian terms of reference to describe non-Christian religions, the dearth of concrete example and detail for all other religions, and the exactitude with which one set of outcomes parallels the other, it is evident that **there are no substantive outcomes for the study of religions other than Christianity**. As it stands, the proposed curriculum would be better understood if the three tables for "other world religions" were replaced with a single footnote: "these outcomes can be applied, with appropriate substitutions for "Christianity", to other world religions". Indeed it is this that shows that "other world religions" is not intended as a placeholder, since if it were, the entire syllabus could be expressed using the placeholder "religion" to include Christianity.

The proposed experiences and outcomes for the study of world religions are little more than a search-and-replace curriculum with residual Christian flavouring. This may be a harsh assessment, but it is supported by the evidence. **To put the matter simply: teachers are given clear guidance about whom and what to discuss when teaching about Christianity, whereas there is not a single named topic to guide the teaching about any other faith.**

Special treatment for Christianity

In three particulars, the outcomes for Christianity are unique: references to the "Bible", reference to a particular passage of the "New Testament", and reference to "Christian communities in my local area".

(a) "The Bible"

Primary pupils are to explore and investigate stories and moral values from the Bible (RME 001A, RME 101A, RME 104E, RME 204E). "The Bible" is, however, not a neutral term, and cannot be used in an unqualified way within a framework that values diversity. Typical Christian usage is shorthand for what Christians refer to as the "Old and New Testaments". "Old Testament" is the Christian term for the Jewish Bible, or *Tanakh*, which presupposes a "New Testament", and so a Christian view of the relationship between the "Old" and the "New". The term is therefore avoided by scholars.

Since the same narrative space is occupied by Judaism, Christianity, and, to some degree, by Islam, a curriculum that respects the integrity of "other world religions" must not claim that narrative space exclusively for Christianity. Sacred text is distinct from other text in the relationship it has with a religious community. It is important to recognise that studying a text in translation can also introduce bias, and Jewish and Christian translations of the same passage of the Hebrew Bible often differ because both the context and the theological presuppositions differ. In general also, Christian appeals to biblical authority generally end with reference to a translation regarded as authoritative, whereas even secular Jews unfamiliar with the original language recognise the underlying authority of the Hebrew text. For all these reasons, the Jewish Bible and the Christian "Old Testament" must be regarded as distinct-

Although this distinction is beyond the comprehension of the most primary children who "explore Bible stories", it is again important in setting the conceptual framework of the teacher. At the primary level, stories and moral values that Christians locate in the Hebrew Bible, their "Old Testament", should not be presented uniquely as Christian. The Jewish provenance of these stories and values should be affirmed to all children, and especially to

Jewish children. No Jewish six-year old should hear the story of Abraham or Noah and be told that it comes from the Christian Bible. No child should hear the story of Abraham or Noah and not be told that they were written in Hebrew in the text that Jews hold most sacred. And yet, the Christian outcomes, as currently written, expropriate the text of the *Tanakh* and accord no respect to its Jewish origins, far less a Jewish interpretation.

Care must be taken to distinguish between the plain meaning of the text and interpretation of it that is exclusively Christian. For example: the Garden of Eden story is a text shared by Christians and Jews, but only Christians interpret expulsion from the Garden as "the Fall". Jews do not think of humanity as fallen. Similarly, whilst the text of Isaiah is shared by Jews and Christians, only the latter interpret it as predicting the birth and death of Jesus. This distinction must be heeded at all levels in the curriculum since both religions ascribe great importance to interpretation of the text.

The primary-school Christianity outcomes referring to "*the Bible*" should therefore be rewritten to distinguish between narratives that religions have in common and specific religious meanings of the narratives that are not shared. If for example, exploring stories (RME 101A) leads to describing Christian belief, and these stories come from the Jewish Bible, the teacher needs to explain, albeit at a simple level, that these are Jewish stories, and that Christians and Jews find support for different beliefs in the same stories.

(b) The Good Samaritan (RME 105F)

Even within an exclusively Christian reading of the document, outcome RME 105F is an anomaly. It mentions a particular story from the New Testament: the Good Samaritan. No other outcome provides such specific detail: "*I can describe the key features of Christian values which are expressed in stories such as the Good Samaritan*". This example is particularly unfortunate. Simplistic Christian interpretation of this parable contrasts "Christian love" with "Jewish legalism", to the detriment of Jews and Judaism. It is a locus of typical historic anti-Jewish interpretation of the New Testament. Modern scholars reject this juxtaposition, and no teacher should tell this story in class without some preparation. The parable is told within a discourse (between Jesus and the lawyer) that is in the typical form of Talmudic debate, and the moral of the story is set within a thoroughly Jewish environment.² The moral of the story, that people must go out of their way to help someone in trouble, no matter who they are, cannot therefore be claimed exclusively for Christianity. To do so would be to imply that this ethic was lacking in first-century Judaism.

It would be better for this example to be replaced, or for parallel examples from other faiths to be introduced.

(c) Local faith communities

One pair of outcomes (Christian and "other") for young primary children shows gratuitous differentiation. There are significant phrases (underlined) in the Christian outcome that are missing from the 'other' outcome.

- RME 106H: *Through investigating the Christian communities in my local area I am discovering how Scotland's Christian communities demonstrate their beliefs through prayer, worship and special ceremonies*

² For background reading see:

Levine, Amy-Jill (2006), *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*, HarperOne.

- RME 112T: *I am discovering how followers of other world religions demonstrate their beliefs through prayer, worship and special ceremonies.*

There is a clear contrast here between active investigation and merely passive discovery. A direct transposition would have resulted in:

- *Through investigating the communities of other world religions in my local area I am discovering how the communities of other world religions in Scotland demonstrate their beliefs through prayer, worship and special ceremonies.*

RME 106H seems to imply that pupils should visit a church. Where other places of worship are accessible, they too could be visited, and RME 112T should make this clear. Although minority faith communities may be extremely small in many areas — in some cases only a few families or individuals — that is no reason to edit out their existence completely. In fact the reverse is true: if there are few people belonging to religious minorities, it is all the more vital for them and for the wider community that their existence be affirmed. There may not be a place of worship to visit, or a member of the clergy to invite into the school, but their existence should not be denied, and all reasonable steps should be taken to bring appropriate resources into the school especially if there are none to visit nearby.

Both outcomes end with the same objective: *"I am developing respect for the practices and traditions of others"*. In RME 106H, this respect is clearly intended to be borne out of personal experience. In RME 112T respect is an abstract value with regard to, for all the child knows, people in an alien culture on the other side of the world. Also, given the prominence of the word "other" throughout the syllabus, this objective in the context of the Christian syllabus, risks sounding condescending.

Outcomes for the study of "practices and traditions" should be restructured to give Scottish Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, etc, parity with Scottish Christians. Such people are presumed to exist in the 'search-and-and-replace' fourth-level outcomes for "values and issues" (for example: *"I can explain how the values of other world religions contribute to as well as challenge Scottish and other societies."* (RME 412S)) but they have been edited out of primary children's learning about religious practice.

Summary

- The draft Outcomes and Experiences make Christianity a benchmark religion.
- Pupils from non-Christian backgrounds will struggle to recognise in classroom RME the religious practice of their own family.

Conclusion

The proposed curriculum seeks to instill respect for religion and religious people beyond the immediate experience of the pupil. **It is evident from the above observations that the proposed curriculum does not exhibit the very values it seeks to promote.**

The broad framework of the curriculum should be restructured to remove the distinction between Christian and an undifferentiated "other". This is not justified by the content, and is socially divisive. A better approach would be a highly generalised single framework with concrete examples taken from many religions and expressed within their own terms.

One member of the Scottish Jewish community commented to us:

the "othering" which is at the heart of this curriculum will result in a Scotland that is less tolerant. That would be unfortunate, particularly since I think it's the opposite of

what is actually intended. I should also note that the perspective in which one group is identified as normative and the others defined in relation to that group (eg, “Christianity” vs “other religions”, or the use of a curricular structure derived from Christianity to address all religions) is widely regarded as bad equalities practice. One would not do this with race or ethnicity, and it should not be done with religion, either.

I'm afraid that this RME curriculum needs to be completely reworked from first principles. That's a shame, because clearly a considerable amount of work has gone into this draft. Had the Jewish communities and other religious communities been consulted at an earlier stage about the proposed approach, this waste could have been avoided.

4. The draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes provide opportunities to promote good teaching approaches and deep learning. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree *agree* *disagree* ***strongly disagree*** *don't know*

On the contrary, they send an entirely negative message about “other” (i.e. non-Christian) faiths. This is hardly a good teaching approach!

5. The draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes provide opportunities for effective links with other areas of the curriculum. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree *agree* *disagree* ***strongly disagree*** *don't know*

There are clearly opportunities for exploring aspects of a culture, society and history through religion. In the primary school and nursery, however, the experience of our respondents is that integrating RME with other subjects means spending time, over several weeks, on Christmas preparations, such as carol singing and making Christmas cards and decorations during music and art lessons. Jewish children are either pressured into conforming, or provided with an impoverished curriculum, while Christian children enjoy an exclusive form of cultural enrichment. There is a fine line between learning about a religion through activity, and behaving as an adherent of that religion. Respondents consider that in acting in a nativity play that line would be crossed, but their experience of addressing the issue at local level has been unsatisfactory. For example, one family was told by a teacher that there are lots of Christmas activities because cross-curricular links are a requirement!

Guidelines need to be developed to avoid personalising the teaching of RME in this way, especially for the youngest children, including pre-school, where this kind of practice seems more common.

The relation between history and religion must be treated with care. The history of a faith community, as of any community, is important, and its study will undoubtedly result in a better understanding of the community's attitudes and needs, and of the contribution they have made and are making to society as a whole. The history of a religion, and even less of a religious community, is not, however, the religion itself, and it is not appropriate for it to be taught as if it were. Unfortunately this is not universally understood, and we are

aware of current curricular material from LTS³, in which the Holocaust has been associated with Judaism as if it were a religious feature. In this material Abraham and Moses feature alongside Roman invasion and the Holocaust in a timeline of salient events. In this timeline, Jews as Old Testament figures are followed by Jews as victims, but there is no *Torah*, no Temple, and no Talmud.

In any event, making links between the Holocaust and Judaism without also making links between the Holocaust and Christianity is not appropriate, since the Holocaust is as much a challenge to Christian theology as it is an aspect of Jewish history.

The relationship between Christianity and Scottish history and culture offers a natural synergy, but requires great sensitivity. The RME cover paper encourages the use of "*Scottish stories, images, music, poems and prayers*" which, it would appear, means "Scottish Christian". It would, of course, be completely unacceptable to imply that to be Scottish is to be Christian, but that could be the unwitting result of a close integration of the RME Christianity syllabus with Scottish arts and culture.

It is therefore apparent that integration of RME across the curriculum must be subject to formal objectives and criteria, as otherwise it may distort and subvert the RME component. Linking areas of the curriculum together is not inherently a good thing, and there are times when RME should be left to stand alone.

6. Taken together, the draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes provide opportunities for development of the four capacities (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors). To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree agree disagree **strongly disagree** don't know

At the heart of the Curriculum for Excellence are the four capacities it strives for: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors. To attain the four capacities, a child from a family that takes religion seriously needs his or her private religious practice to be affirmed at school. The school functions as the first public arena in which a child must operate as an independent individual, and children who belong to a minority faith depend especially on staff to demonstrate that their religion is respected in wider society. If their religion is never reflected in the RME curriculum, or the teacher presents it merely as something *other* than the Christian norm and not part of "our" community, those children are less likely to become "confident individuals".

Commendably, the RME cover paper finds the following rationale for religious and moral education:

Through developing awareness and appreciation of the value of each individual in a diverse society, religious and moral education engenders responsible attitudes to other people.

But throughout the RME documentation, "diverse society" is perceived to be *out there* across Scotland, not *right here* in the classroom! There are many reports of the only Jewish pupil in the class being invited by a well meaning teacher anxious to be inclusive, to stand up and talk about a Jewish festival. This is not what we mean by affirmation.

³ www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/s1unit_04_tcm4-116694.doc

While the Jewish child should be acknowledged, and perhaps invited to recount personal experience, in typical cases it is not appropriate to ask a child to bear the burden of explanation. A child's understanding cannot compensate for a teacher's unpreparedness, and both that child, and the class in general, need instead to see that the teacher is well-informed, and is a role-model of respect for Jewish pupils and Jewish practice.

The practitioners' objective, "*to take account of and value the religious and cultural diversity within their own local communities, using relevant contexts which are familiar to young people's experiences.*" (Cover Paper) is too weak to guarantee this principle.

We therefore propose that the following become an essential part of the RME curriculum.

It is a fundamental principle that all children throughout Scotland should experience affirmation of their own religious journey. Where a child is being brought up in a religious family, he or she must be supported in owning their religious identity in the school setting, and the RME lesson in particular, especially where the child's religion is poorly represented in the school population.

7. The draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes provide opportunities for children and young people to develop an understanding of how their learning will help them in their future lives. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree *agree* *disagree* *strongly disagree* *don't know*

This objective will not be achieved if the curriculum leaves some children feeling alienated, and others regarding them as indeed alien. We see no evidence that children will learn enough about religion to develop a natural respect for religious people; only a vague sense that "diversity" is a good thing.

8. What do you see as the main strengths of the draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes?

We agree wholeheartedly that "*children and young people [should] develop awareness that beliefs and values are a fundamental part of the fabric of society in communities, locally and globally*", and that "*[i]t is also a fundamental principle that all children throughout Scotland should consider other faiths*".

However, we believe there is another fundamental principle that must also be enshrined in the RME curriculum. **Nowhere in any of the RME documentation is there a recognition that schoolchildren do not come into the classroom as empty vessels; they bring with them the values and assumptions of their background, whatever that may be:** a Christian home, a Jewish home, a Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh home, a consciously secular home, or a home devoid of a relationship with religion. The school and the RME lesson are not their only sources of knowledge about religion.

The proposed experiences and outcomes for development of beliefs and values do not actually suggest that the pupil has or develops any personal belief or practice. But the Cover Paper strongly encourages the idea that the experience of RME (exclusively) will bring this about. It is also suggested, as a "central idea", "*that children and young people should be learning from religious beliefs and as well as learning about them*", and that role-play, and Scottish stories, images, music, poems and prayers should be used to integrate

RME with other parts of the curriculum. Putting these ideas together gets us very close to religious observance.

These passages from the Cover Paper seem to promote a culture in which Jewish children are put under enormous pressure throughout the curriculum. **Children from minority religions are typically withdrawn from religious observance (a legal entitlement), and it is not appropriate for this to be reintroduced elsewhere in the syllabus.**

9. What professional development may be needed to help the implementation of the draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes?

In order to deliver a balanced curriculum, teachers will require a better understanding of religions other than Christianity than is implied in the draft. Furthermore, it is essential that all teaching materials are acceptable to the religious communities they describe. We know from considerable experience that where material is edited by someone without authentic experience of the religion, errors and distortions creep in; this is doubly so when the material needs to be simplified for younger children. **Both the development of the curriculum and teachers' professional development must be guided throughout by consultation with the relevant religious communities.**

One respondent (a nursery teacher) told us:

[T]here is no way my fellow staff members could have expressed clearly any ideas about any religions other than their own. For the children who are not Christians, there will be uncomfortable times...

Raising the problem locally can be frustrating experience. As one parent told us:

The teacher didn't understand why I was upset that my child had been taught that Moses prefigured Jesus — and the head teacher blamed me for distressing the teacher.

If teachers are to achieve the aims aspired to in the Cover Paper, they will need CPD that enables them to locate their own experience of religion within diverse, contemporary Scotland, especially if they are to overcome the bias in the structure and language of the proposed experience and outcomes.

10. In what ways could the draft Religious and moral education experiences and outcomes be developed further?

The draft experiences and outcomes appear to have been written by someone with a completely different worldview from the author of the cover paper. The massive overhaul of the 3–18 curriculum provides a golden opportunity to remedy the problems in the old curriculum, but the current draft exacerbates them. If our differences are to be respected, and all our experiences are to be honoured, then the proposals should be revised so that the language and examples used are derived from the religions and communities of Scotland. **If diversity really matters, it is essential that the curriculum be redeveloped on a neutral framework.**

11. Do you have any further comments?

Coverage

The following appears both in the RME cover paper and as a footnote in the outcomes document:

To avoid superficial and potentially confusing coverage of too many religions and too many aspects, and acknowledging that local circumstances and expectations will vary, it may be appropriate in many primary schools to focus on a maximum of two world religions in addition to Christianity.

Nowhere is it explained what the drivers would be to constrain the teaching of major world religions, and indeed, the proposed curriculum for Roman Catholic schools envisages teaching about five or more world religions, and builds in flexibility to take account of the school community:

Normally consideration of Judaism and Islam would be the focus of learning in the primary stages (although this can be adapted, where appropriate, to include some other world religions which are represented in the school context). (RERC Cover Paper)

In multicultural communities there are compelling reasons to reflect local diversity in RME lessons. Equally, in homogenous communities there are compelling reasons to introduce religions and cultures that the children will not encounter in everyday life. Both of these points support the assertion in the Cover Paper that all children "should consider other faiths and views regardless of the child or young person's situation and local context."

We therefore urge that, rather than a note explicitly discouraging coverage of major world religions, it should be a requirement that the RME curriculum include at least Judaism and Islam, and all other major religions represented by the relevant pupil body.

The Christian curriculum

Given that a dedicated curriculum is provided for Christianity, its lack of detail is puzzling. It is striking that ethics is a pervasive theme and specific beliefs are absent, even in the "Beliefs" section. Reference to exclusively Christian belief is oblique and ambiguous: "*Christian beliefs about God, Jesus, the human condition*" (RME 301A). This omission again intimates bias, as it presupposes that teachers are already knowledgeable about Christianity. Since that is not the case, the curriculum should state directly what those beliefs are (for example, incarnation and resurrection).

The credal commitment that defines a Christian is replaced by the expectation of ethical behaviour in many of the proposed outcomes, for example:

- "*how these beliefs lead to actions for Christians*" (RME 301A)
- "*how putting these [beliefs] into practice might lead to a better society*" (RME 401A).
- "*Through investigating Christian responses to issues of morality I can discuss ways in which to create a more just, equal, compassionate and tolerant society.*" (Values and issues, RME 305E)
- "*I can consider the place of [Christian traditions, practices and customs] in the contemporary religious life of Scotland.*" (Practices and traditions, RME 406H)

Social ethics and social awareness seem to be dominant drivers, not knowledge of Christianity in itself. While Christianity implies a commitment to ethical behaviour, they are by no means the same thing.

There is effectively no curriculum for Judaism, and what guidance there is is expressed in Christian terms. In the detail of the Christian curriculum it is evident that the Christianity implied here is a code of ethics, not a messianic faith with a unique system of belief. While we are sure this emphasis has the best of intentions, contemporary Christian and Jewish scholarship show its negative consequences. The identification of Christianity with ethics is a substrate on which anti-Jewish theology, and ultimately antisemitism, grows. In the context of that historical struggle, it has stigmatised Judaism as being hypocritical, legalistic, purity-obsessed in contrast to a Christianity that is morally advanced, superior, and liberating.⁴, and it has rarely made any effort to distinguish first century Jews and Judaism from their contemporary successors. This concern about what is said about “the Jews” is, of course, magnified the more simplistic the level at which the topic is discussed. Exclusive emphasis on Christian ethics in the curriculum is therefore a cause of concern to Jews. We urge the authors of the curriculum to consider our concern. A good starting point is website of the International Council of Christians and Jews, which contains excellent introductory material. In a nutshell:

the church's attitude to Jews and Judaism has not been divorced from its own self-understanding. Seldom has Judaism been allowed to have an integrity of its own. All too often it has been seen as the obverse of Christianity, of what Christianity is not.⁵

When Christianity is treated as synonymous with social ethics, it is hard to find space for genuine Jewish values:

In the popular Christian imagination, Jesus still remains defined, incorrectly and unfortunately, as "against" the Law, or at least against how it was understood at the time; as "against" the Temple as an institution and not simply against its first-century leadership, as "against" the people Israel but in favor of the Gentiles. Jesus becomes the rebel who, unlike every other Jew, practices social justice.⁶

It may be that the curriculum has been angled to be attractive to modern, secular young people whose families have slowly deserted traditional Christian practice, and that the focus on ethics is designed to engage their interest. Given that Christianity is the only religion mentioned in the curriculum, and given how Judaism might be perceived as a result, we do not agree that the ends justify the means.

We agree that young people should be encouraged to live ethical lives and show social responsibility. But if the RME curriculum as a whole is to be genuinely respectful of other religions, especially of Judaism, which Christianity has used so often as its foil, it must not be the primary aim of the Christianity curriculum to transmit a code of ethics clothed exclusively in Christian language.

Summary and Conclusion

Learning and Teaching Scotland describes the Curriculum for Excellence as: “challenging us to think differently about the curriculum”. In fact the challenge is for LTS to take this opportunity to think differently about religious and moral education in Scotland.

In taking soundings from the Jewish community, from parents and teachers, we have heard again and again:

⁴ Salmon, Marilyn J. (2006) *Preaching without contempt: overcoming unintended anti-Judaism*, Fortress.

⁵ Anderson, Robert (undated) *Responses to Jesus: the Jewish “no” and the Christian “yes”*, International Council of Christians and Jews, website :<http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=798>

⁶ Levine, Amy-Jill (2006), *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*, HarperOne, p.19

- how frustrated adults feel;
- how left out and self-conscious children feel;
- how uncomprehending the Scottish educational community is.

The challenge is for the authors of the RME curriculum to rise to their own aspirations.

Our detailed response has shown that :

- the teaching of Christianity must not be paradigmatic for the teaching of Judaism,
- Christianity must not be presented as a universality of ethics.

On behalf of the Jewish Community, **we urge LTS as strongly as we can to put into practice the ideals espoused in the Cover Paper:**

Through developing awareness and appreciation of the value of each individual in a diverse society, religious and moral education engenders responsible attitudes to other people. This awareness and appreciation will assist in counteracting prejudice and intolerance in issues such as sectarianism and discrimination more broadly.

The proposed curriculum as it stands cannot possibly support this aspiration. In fact it is an example of why change is needed.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to work with LTS in the development of a curriculum that truly engages with all the people of Scotland.

Recommendations

- (a) The curriculum should be redrafted starting from a foundation of equality for all Scotland's communities and in particular for all our children.**
- (b) The new draft should result from full collaboration with all Scotland's religious communities.**
- (c) A stated objective of the new RME curriculum should be to support every pupil from a family that claims religious identity in owning that religious identity publicly in the school setting.**
- (d) A prerequisite for the success of the new RME curriculum is the respect and confidence shown to pupils of all religions by a prepared and informed teacher. Meeting this prerequisite should be an explicit priority in LTS's preparation for full deployment of the Curriculum for Excellence.**

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges. SCoJeC is Scottish Charity SC029438, and its aims are to advance public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community. It works with others to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality, and represents the Jewish community in Scotland to government and other statutory and official bodies on matters affecting the Jewish community.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.